

Look at passion, values rather than qualifications when hiring: Panel

Experts at IPS forum call for paradigm shift as country moves towards more inclusive hiring

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Employers should factor in the passion and values of prospective new hires rather than their productivity output or academic qualifications as Singapore moves towards more inclusive hiring.

This was among the suggestions raised by panellists yesterday at an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) forum on the topic of corporate policies and culture.

The panellists also stressed the importance of internships in helping people of various backgrounds

seek employment, but added that those in such programmes must be able to truly learn from the experience and better understand the sector, rather than just carry out routine tasks.

Yesterday's event was the last in a series of three online forums that are part of IPS' Reimagining Singapore 2030 project, which looks at how the Republic can achieve happiness, prosperity and progress in the next decade and beyond.

The panellists were Ms Carrie Tan, founder and strategic adviser of charity Daughters Of Tomorrow and an MP for Nee Soon GRC; Ms Chia Yong Yong, a former Nomi-

nated MP, as well as current member of disability advocacy agency SPD's board advisory panel and board member of SG Enable; Ms Junie Foo, president of the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations; and Mr Sandy Monteiro, founder of sandwich chain Rebel Gurl, which focuses on giving employees a sense of ownership in the business.

The forum was moderated by Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director for research and senior research fellow at IPS.

Mr Monteiro said that more than 80 per cent of his staff had zero food and beverage experience when he hired them, and now they have contributed to making Rebel one of the best sandwich shops in Singapore.

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the chance to be more than they see themselves to be," he said.

Ms Tan said that when it comes to working women who feel the pressure of balancing caring for the family and a career, the main barrier is that "society tends to view workers as producing units of output".

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In response to a question on how to hire inclusively when many think that being meritocratic means looking at academic qualifications, Ms Foo said human resources personnel should look at workers as talent and learn to take chances.

Ms Tan said human resources personnel should be trained in how to communicate the value of a person who is a good fit, even if the academic qualifications are not strong.

The panel also discussed how to avoid tokenism when trying to hire inclusively, as well as how to create a culture of acceptance when hiring those with disabilities, among other topics.

Ms Chia, who uses a wheelchair, said employers should be mindful of difficulties that may arise from inclusive hiring, and redesign jobs to address them.

Employers who have done so have seen the potential beyond simple tasks for people with disabilities, and many found that it also made business sense, she said.

As the panel concluded, Ms Chia stressed that for employment to work, both employee and employer have to play a part.

"(Apart from the paradigm shift among the leaders and human resources personnel at a company), I would like us to all be realistic about ourselves, what we can do and what we cannot. It is incumbent upon us to assimilate into the culture of the company."

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